

## Saskatchewan: the world's nuclear burial ground?

Proposal for an investigate for a one-hour film

When markets are good, Saskatchewan supplies 30% of the world's demand for uranium. Since Chernobyl and the end of the Cold War, the market is down. However, there is one area in the nuclear industry where the world market is ready to boom: spent fuel disposal. It is ready to boom because the nuclear industry is doomed if it cannot dispose of its high-level waste, and yet nobody wants it in their backyard. The answer may lie in Saskatchewan.

In 1991, Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. (AECL) commissioned a management consultant firm called Peat, Marwick, Stevenson and Kellogg to look into the economic feasibility of establishing an nuclear waste storage facility in the Precambrian shield in northern Saskatchewan. Here are some extracts from their report:

With the world's largest uranium industry, Saskatchewan would be well positioned to develop a used fuel repository....Fuel leasing arrangements could be considered where uranium would be provided and the used fuel taken back for ultimate disposal....it could increase Saskatchewan uranium sales by up to 10%....China has offered to take used fuel for ultimate disposal in the Gobi desert on a commercial basis....(but) no other country has offered a fuel-leasing service....The major utilities in Japan, Korea, USA, Germany, Belgium and Sweden would be very supportive of Canada's initiative. That support could well translate into business....AECL estimates total direct costs (of its proposal for an underground storage facility) at \$9 to 14.5 billion, direct employment of 1100 during construction and 600 during operation....Public hearings on AECL's proposal will likely occur in late 1992 or 1993, by which time Saskatchewan would have to declare its candidacy.

The federal Department of the Environment did not get these hearings going until this year. They will start in Toronto on March 11. Saskatchewan's case will be strengthened by the emergence of the first community in the world to express a positive interest in the use of its territory as a potential site. The Meadow Lake Tribal Council, representing nine Cree, Dene and Métis bands in northern Saskatchewan, started a feasibility study in 1993, with the help of AECL.

All the leading players in the nuclear debate will be at these hearings, which will continue intermittently over the next two months in Toronto, Pickering, Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Chalk River. AECL will be arguing that the "multiple barrier concept" it has developed over the past 15 years in its underground research centred in Manitoba is "a completely safe process by which nuclear waste can be stored deep in the granite of the Canadian shield". This will be opposed by environmentalists who argue that some

fission waste material can remain lethal for half a million years, and that no number of underground barriers could guarantee proof against leakage for that length of time.

The Environmental Assessment Panel conducting the public hearings is expected to provide legitimacy for AECL to proceed with the selection and testing of suitable sites later this year. An aroused public could make even this exploratory work difficult, as shown when AECL's attempt to test disposal sites in northern Ontario in 1980 was stopped by hostile local communities. Its subsequent effort to establish an underground research centre in nuclear-free Manitoba was successful only when the provincial government quelled public opposition by passing a law that no nuclear waste could be imported for testing.

What happened in Germany last year is an indication of what an explosive issue this can be. It took a tractor-trailer carrying a cask of nuclear waste most of the year to cover a distance of 30 kms to a depository in Lower Saxony. It was constantly stalled by a combination of legal action and sabotage undertaken by local communities along the route. Rufina Laws, the Apache woman who has been called "the native Karen Silkwood", has predicted that the nuclear waste issue will spark "the next great social movement, on the scale of the civil-rights and anti-war movements" of the last half century. She led the resistance to the use of her reserve in New Mexico as a temporary nuclear waste depository.

Research for this film should begin with my attendance at the hearings in Toronto the week of March 11, and should include a week in Saskatchewan after an engagement I have in Winnipeg the week of March 18. A script could be prepared for May 1, with a view to production beginning in Saskatchewan in September, when the Panel will be holding its hearings there, and ending with the undertaking of site testing in that province. Consideration will be given to shooting sequences in Germany and China, which are expected to send observers to the Toronto hearings.

Martin Duckworth  
February, 1996

BUDGET FOR RESEARCH AND SCRIPTING OF "PLUTONIUM IN SASKATCHEWAN?"

1. Travel from Winnipeg to northern Saskatchewan for one month  
at the end of March (already spent).....\$1600
2. Travel from Montreal to Chalk River for 2 days  
in early May (already spent)..... 200
3. Travel from Montreal to North Hatley, Gentilly and Trois  
Rivières, Quebec for 2 days..... 200
4. Travel from Montreal to Ottawa for 2 days..... 200
5. Travel from Montreal to Toronto, Pickering and London  
for one week..... 800
6. Travel from Montreal to northern Saskatchewan  
for one week..... 2000
7. Travel from Saskatoon to Nevada to Washington, D.C.,  
to Montreal for two weeks..... 3000
8. Travel from Montreal to Germany for two weeks..... 3000
9. Videotaping, transferring and transcribing  
research material..... 1000
10. Telephone, fax and incidentals for 10 weeks..... 1000
11. Remuneration for 1 week preparation, 8 weeks travel  
and 1 week writing.....10,000

Total                   \$23,000